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Of Martyrs and Minstrels

Trevon J. Coleman
University of Central Florida

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OF MARTYRS AND MINSTRELS

by

TREVON JAKAAR COLEMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major in Studio Art
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ABSTRACT

“Our search for understanding in matters of race automatically incline us toward blackness, although that is not where these answers lie.” – Nell Irvin Painter.

Over the course of, and in partial fulfilment for, the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art and the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film Production, I have produced a multimedia body of work. I made this body of work as a reflection and result of my processes and studies, and as a method to examine perception, and representation in relation to my identity. This body of work combines drawing, painting, printmaking, ceramics, and filmmaking; utilizing each medium to scrutinize language, particularly that of the terms “black” and “white” and their cultural relationships to each other. Through this practice, my work evolved into a study of expectation, as situated through language, and conventional understanding. This work adds to the discourse on spaces and expectations of marginalized communities, art, and continues the tradition of the artists’ practice as a form of research. I also position this work in relation to current mass culture iconography while using a distancing effect to explore concepts of martyrdom and minstrelsy as reflections of expectations on my own experience.

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I would like to take time to acknowledge the faculty and staff at the University of Central Florida, whose questions prompted me to ask more questions of myself and others. Professor Robert Rivers, for reminding me how to see. Assistant Director Jason Burrell, for consistently engaging my technique and content, simultaneously showing an interest in me as a person. Lecturer Kate Shults for introducing me to the right media at the right time, which often said the thing I was struggling to say. Professor Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz for providing the example of how to dive into art with your entire being, honestly and unapologetically. And the other faculty and staff, without whom I would not have made the progress I have. Dennis Ahearn, Larry Cooper, Chuck Abraham, Dr. Keri Watson, Dr. Melissa Geppert, Lisa Peterson, Ula Stoeckl, Zachary Beckler, Jon Bowen. And Christopher Harris for highlighting a turning point in how I think about my work and its relationship to how I think about myself

I would like to acknowledge and thank my committee, Professor Carla Poindexter, Professor Lisa Danker, and Yson DeBlois whose guidance both in and out of the classroom has led to numerous breakthroughs in my work, and laid foundations for continued growth.

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INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this thesis was the desire to view my body of work in a single context. I attend the University of Central Florida, pursuing a dual degree: Studio Art BFA and Film Production BFA. The two programs are not connected regarding curriculum, and as such my studies felt like separate parts of myself. The more I created, strong themes of perception, representation, and identity showed through both practices. As I explored these themes, my work became a study of expectations projected onto my identity and into the work; these expectations are collected from personal experience, feedback, and societal norms. Utilizing the language of the mediums, I began to undo the ability to identify; creating distance between the viewer and the work. Symbolizing the lack of actual understanding between viewer, presenter's personal experience, and the correlation with the expected black experience, I began to make work that alienates the audience. I must specify, the separation created is also why this study is not an account of the history of marginalization, nor a quantitative analysis of racial bias as these studies exist in other fields – sociology, psychology, anthropology. This is a catalogue of the evolution of the work in response to these expectations and how the work changed to address them. I will also refer to cinematic and art historic convention as they relate to the work, however an in-depth study of classical theory is not necessary to engage with the content. The work directly addresses each individual's experience and their individual perceptions. I am assuming each reader will experience this writing as an extension of the body of work. As a result, the ability to connect, using one's own understanding, is thrown into question. An

alternative view, active participation, or acknowledgement of the reader/viewer's¹ own expectation is required.

I began my career in art as a caricaturist. I've worked in theme parks, private events, and fairs up and down the east coast. My background in caricature introduced me to a variety of people from across the globe. This foundation was a training in empathy. Regarding the "personality of the [sitter, to] produce an intimate likeness rather than a banal portrait, the result of mere chance, you must put yourself at once in communion with the sitter, size up [their] thoughts and [their] very character." (Hirsch 68). This quote from Nadar² represents the idea that in order to connect with another, you must leave your own understanding; only then can they be truly represented. This foundation shaped the way I engage with others and produce my work. It also calls to focus the subjectivity of the artist in relation to creating work and, regarding this study, subjectivity in the qualifiers of expectation.

This thesis is divided into the chapters Perception, Representation, Identity and Expectation. The first chapter, Perception, is a personal recall of interactions and perceptions of me. Though these interpretations are steeped in societal commonplace, I recognize the account of these interactions is filtered through my own perception. The next chapter, Representation, is an account of the body of work, and how the mediums are used to engage the personal and universal. Identity, the third chapter, will list inspirations, and threads that lead to and link the body of work. The three previous chapters set up the framework for the final chapter,

¹ Reader and Viewer will be used interchangeably henceforth.

² Gaspard Felix Tournachon, also known as Nadar, was a caricaturist and photographer of the 17th century.

Expectation. This chapter focuses on the use of theory to distance the audience from what they would expect, revealing the layers, steps, and assumptions used to accomplish a distanced space.

The themes in this body of work are universal, political, and personal. Contradiction is utilized as a medium as important as paint and film. The intention is to spur thought and provoke the audience to participate in the uncovering of their own expectations.

CHAPTER 1: PERCEPTION

I was twenty-five when I received my acceptance letter to UCF. I worked as a caricaturist for ten years at that point. I wasn't sure what to expect but my goal was to pursue two degrees; one in film, and the other in studio art illustration. I arrived at campus early, to walk around and familiarize myself with the school. I wore a gold and black bowtie featuring a pattern of Knightro, the athletic department mascot. As a light-skinned African American/Black male (high yellow, as my complexion is sometimes referred to by other African Americans), I am often asked what I'm "mixed with", or whether it's my mother or father that is white. The misconception that a light skinned black person must be of mix-raced decent comes from the history of slavery, rape, and the birth of the slave master's bastard children; often noticeable by their lighter complexion. In actuality, there are a range of skin tones that come out of the African diaspora; some the results of migration and evolution. As I engaged with people, to their surprise it seemed, I spoke well, and had a way of engaging content critically that was also unexpected. The surprise stemming from stereotypes of minorities having little to no education. Or could it be from the fact that, despite being twenty-five, I looked physically like I was nineteen? Whichever the case, this is not a new experience for me.



Figure 1: Self Portrait 1, Charcoal on Newsprint, 24"x36", 2014, by Author

After a few years into the programs, and after establishing myself as an academic, two perceptions emerge from my peers. The first was that I was a place to go for help. I worked as a Resident Assistant (RA) for the housing department for four years of my undergraduate and put myself in a mentorship position. I helped on numerous other student projects, often challenging the creators to push themselves beyond their limitations. Although ultimately positive actions, there were also perceptions that I thought myself to be superior or in some way, heroic. The second is that I was a “try hard”, someone that needed to do more and be recognized. I relate these perceptions to the minstrel archetype. The minstrel is a caricature of blackness, ultimately placed for entertainment of a white audience. As a light-skinned Black male, walking around wearing a button up shirt and bowtie also invokes the house Negro trope. A term referencing the difference between the treatment of plantation slaves and slaves that worked in the house. House slaves were sometimes taught English, given the master’s old clothes, and sometimes secretly taught to read. The evocation of ‘Zip Coon’ a minstrel character, freed slave who thinks he’s smart, but is actually a fool becomes a personal anxiety. The minstrel aware or unaware of his own mockery, is unable to assimilate into the white world, assimilation being something desired. Malcom X, gave a speech November 1963, called “Message to the Grass Roots”, where he defines the House Negro and Field Negro in modern comparisons. The minstrel is the house Negro. The impression that I am attempting to assimilate would make me in Malcom X’s words, a house Negro. White audiences seeing my accomplishments and labeling me “one of the good ones” – a derogatory phrase emphasizing the perception that most black people are undesired – is a commonplace experience for me, and so there is no value in that praise.

These interactions and accounts represent the ways I have read people, meanings, and alternate meanings. These thoughts help me to form a line of questioning for my work. I began drawing and painting myself, looking at my self-representations searching for evidence of unifying content. Have I been portraying myself as a minstrel, a caricature of blackness? Is my assimilation into an academic environment contingent upon my works relevance to black specific scholarship? Have I been considering my blackness at all in my relationships with the work or viewers of my work? How does the history of two-dimensional art apply to my work, or how much is ignored due to my being black? What can film offer my work that drawing, and painting cannot? And lastly, how can I use both, two dimensional and time-based media to examine these perceptions and my own engagement in their truth. Some of these questions are rhetorical or have no truth, but the engagement of them creates a dialogue from which to spring board content.

CHAPTER 2: REPRESENTATION

My body of work began with self-portraiture. Initially started as a series for class, my own representation became a focus of study. How do I draw myself differently from image to image, while not exaggerating the need to? My background in caricature helped, as every person draws a subject differently; likewise, one artist could draw the same subject, many ways. This is perception at work. The time, place, environment, and person change what and how you see. Remembering the quote by Nadar, I used various angles to commune with my own image, outside of intense focus. These drawings in keeping with the series featured a self-portrait and skeleton in some combination (Figures 2, 3, and 4). In a critique with Coco Fusco, she commented the works evoked a symbol of death and morbidity. Fusco wondered if that was intentional, and I began to wonder as well. This was one of the examples of how the audience brings in their own interpretations, and perceptions. I am not smiling in any of the images. This was due to the focus and intensity of the life drawings from mirrors, but it made me think back on all the images I've made of myself, or photos I've taken. I'm not smiling in a large portion of them.



Figure 2: "Reach", Charcoal and Ink Wash on BFK Rives, 22"x28", 2014, by Author



Figure 3: "Us", Charcoal an Ink Wash on Arches, 22"x28", 2014, by Author



Figure 4: Untitled Portrait with Skeleton, Charcoal on Newsprint, 36"x48", 2014, by Author

Simultaneously working in film, my film work was exploring a different concern. I began working with 16mm film, shooting on the Bolex H16 after I sat in on a class with Professor Christopher Harris. Professor Harris is an internationally renowned experimental filmmaker. I

was not in the Production BFA at the time and I approached him about my interest. He invited me to join them. I purchased my own camera and began working in tandem with the class. As a result of that class and a film theory class with another experimental filmmaker, Professor Lisa Danker, I began to make experimental films examining and challenging theory using film form. The initial question, film as art. Rudolf Arnheim, an early film theorist argues that the art of film comes from perspective (Braudy and Cohen, 282-91). Using a cube, Arnheim describes the optics of a lens and the relationship to the human eye; each takes in only partial information due to the positioning of the viewer. Initially revealed as a technological achievement for cinema's ability to capture "reality", film as art started gradually as filmmakers began "consciously stress[ing] the peculiarities of [the] medium" (286). One of my first experiments was in regard to theorist Bela Balasz' in "The Close-Up" from *Theory of Film*. Balasz described closeups as the "pictures expressing the sensibility of the director" and stated that "facial expression is the most subjective manifestation of man" (Braudy and Cohen, 274-5). Balasz describes the objective relationships that cause subjective responses; in the case of the close up, the ability to recognize the micro physiognomies that occur within facial expressions. By comparing these reactions with music and a landslide, he equates a relationship that does not exist within time but an objective relationship; the "aggregate of the movements of single particles" (Braudy and Cohen, 274-6). Positioning Arnheim and Balasz in concurrence I gathered that the subjective response, as Arnheim stated is in the director's control, was instead based off the viewer's previous experience; the internal response, caused by outside stimuli. In stressing the audience's role in the peculiarity of the film medium, I set out to film 4,000 faces.

The 4,000 faces experiment was intended to highlight the micro physiognomies of facial expression. A one-hundred-foot roll of 16mm film is equal to roughly 4,000 frames. The illusion of motion in film is created by the rapid projection of still images, typically at 24 frames per second. Peter Kubelka, filmmaker and theorist, states that the essence of film is in between frames, not shots as other montage theory would suggest. I used the frame by frame mode of the Bolex camera to take a single frame, like a photograph, of 4,000 individual people. Each person I would direct to position their face in a specific order. When projected at 24 frames per second, this would create an animation of a facial expression change. I used instruction that did not disclose to the subject what the facial expression was, just the position to place each of their features. This removes the subjectivity from the subject or actor's performance as well as my own subjective description of the emotion. The focus on the individual frames would create an image that would be smooth in transition of features, the aggregate of single particles. The viewer would then identify the expression based on their own understanding or perception of emotion. I was unable to complete the experiment completely as the organization needed to gather 4,000 people was outside of my means. I did however document the process and make a version of the experiment showing one emotion. Viewers of the experiment would make the expression as the piece projected. This method of directing of the audience would become vital in my later work.

During this time, I also filmed black and white hula hoop dancers on black and white backdrops. Inspired by *Arnulf Rainer*, a film by Kubelka in which clear (appears white when projected) and black frames alternate rhythmically, I wanted to look at black and white as

language and medium. I had not left figurative work at this time and I asked a few dancers, one black and one white, to collaborate. I had them wear black and white respectively. I would come to repeat this experiment with the same dancers later³.

While my film work began to explore notions of race in an experimentally formal way, my studio practice focused on self-portraiture, purely formal or technical applications; still academic studies. Intermediate Painting was the class that changed how my studio work functioned for me. I painted a self-portrait (Figure 5) appropriating the style of one of my favorite caricaturists, Sebastian Kruger and his painting of Charles Bronson. The painting displayed slightly exaggerated features and expressive color, and line work drawing. I chose an image of myself exposing teeth, a false smile because in all my self-portraiture, and extending to photographs of me, as noted before, I do not smile. This being a caricature study, I thought the perfect opportunity to explore that relationship.

During that critique a few comments gave me pause. A reference was made to the teeth, referring to the baring of teeth of an animal, signifying rage. This comment immediately triggered in my mind the association of blackness with savagery, and the smile of the blackface minstrel character. After that moment, the reading of my work as needing to be Black or related to blackness was something I began challenging. I challenged the notion that these things were inherently black rather than the perception of what blackness is. Or that my work must be positioned relative only to my blackness. I was told it was something I would just have to deal with. As a result, the hoodie became a necessary icon in my work to challenge those opinions,

³ See “Work” 2018 by Author. <https://vimeo.com/310918087>

where they came from, and their effect on society (Figure 6). Initially created as sports apparel, the correlation to urban fashion (hoodie) and criminality of black men is a commonplace.



Figure 5: "Appropriated Me", Acrylic on Canvas, 22"x28", 2016, by Author



Figure 6: "Target", Acrylic on Canvas, 36"x48", 2016, by Author

I changed my major specialization to Drawing/Printmaking during this time. Continuing with the theme of exploring self, now with the added instigation of racial politicking I made

work on two fronts; myself as subject and who I am as an artist – a Black artist, or an artist who is black (Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7: "Doppelgangers", Xylene Print and Gouache on Arches, 12"x18"each, 2016, by Author



Figure 8: "Face 4/4", Acrylic on Canvas, 8"x8", 2016, by Author

I made my first film in the Film Production BFA in response to these questions: Who can make work about which topics? Can I make work about a community to which I do not belong, or is my work only allowed to reference my relationship to being black? “Delusions of Grandeur” 2017, is the introduction of super-hero iconography (Figure 9). The film featured me as the hero. The production design involved several costume changes. The hero costume deteriorated (changed to less extravagance) as the hero walks through the space. The space was filled with people identifying with the marginalized communities, Women, Immigrant/non-

native, LGBTQ+, and Black minority specific. The dialogue audio in the piece was pulled from focus groups featuring each of these demographics. Some of those people visible in the film can also be heard. “Delusions of Grandeur” while a personal question, was an experiment in collaboration. When producing the film, I reached out to members of marginalized communities to have their input on feelings of media and the entertainment industry. We sat around a table and collected two hours of audio from each demographic; casual conversation led by the group. I only added a bit when the moment was silent. I did however participate in the Black minority specific focus group. Every member of the crew identified with one of the marginalized communities and worked on set in that section’s production. I worked with a different cinematographer, gaffer, grips, and background actors identifying with each section. Everyone involved with the production was explained the concept and each Director of Photography (DP)⁴ chose which platform they wanted to film on, highlighting their unique qualities in relation to cinematic conventions and their demographics. After the film I received feedback from Professor Harris to explore the hero icon. The questions were whether I saw myself as a hero or not. And whether the hero had power and what that power was. This I thought explicit in the content, and received by most viewers to be understood, that the hero had no power.

⁴ Cinematographer and Director of Photography are interchangeable terms in the film industry.



Figure 9: Still from "Delusions of Grandeur" 2017, Directed by Author

While my film work involved collaboration, representation and the use of iconography, I searched for a way to incorporate time-based media into my studio practice. "Spencer on 16mm" series (Figures 10 and 11) began with shooting a friend's music video on 16mm black and white film. The song was never finished so the film was never edited. I began looking at the footage to examine the connotations within the imagery. The song featured a young black man talking about not fitting in, and not being liked. Although it was a rap video, the content was counter to the typical masculine representations in most rap music. I found frames where Spencer's mimetic gestures were of self-harm and paired that with the exploitative expectation and spectacle of pop culture with printmaking. This was the first time I actively engaged a distancing effect in my work, having bold primary colors in a comic style over a black and white morose image.



Figure 10: "Spencer on 16mm, Self-Inflicted", Screen-print on Arches, 15"x19", 2017, by Author

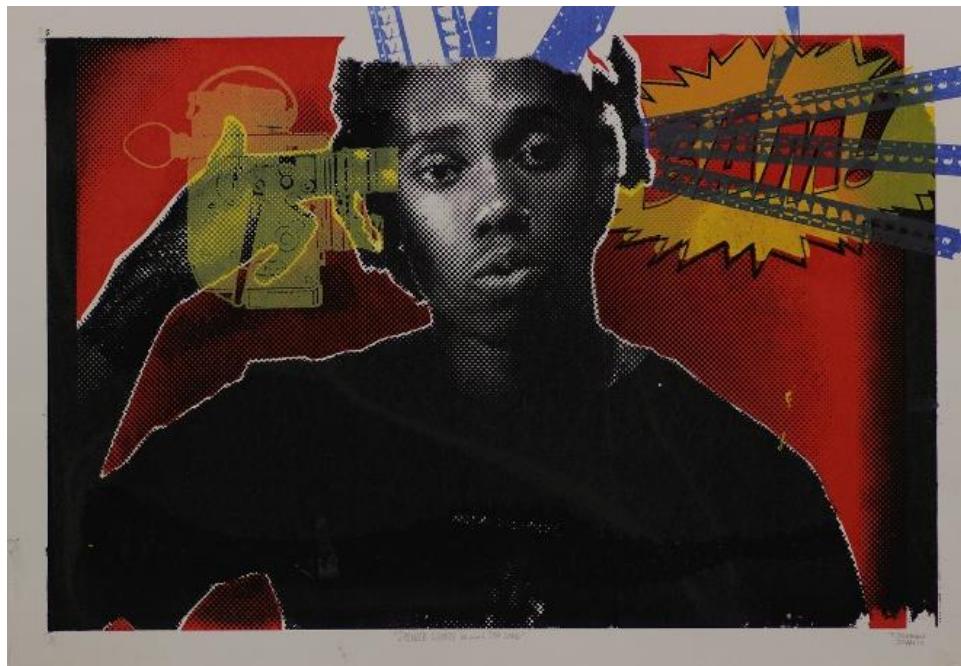


Figure 11: "Spencer Shoots 16mm, Top Load", Screen-print on Hot Press, 22"x19", 2017, by Author

At the same time, I was experimenting with other avenues of working formally, that blended content. This departure sparked a new direction, however due to the filming of my second film “Clear”, 2017, I returned to the iconography of the hoodie and the hero (Figure 12). “Clear” explored performance a distancing effect, highlighting over the top dialogue and circumstance.



Figure 12: Behind the Scenes of "Clear" 2017, Directed by Author. In photo: Trevaughn Christian, Malik Brice, and Author

I continued to make images initially jarring, whether through prompts or otherwise, and attempting to play with language as in the piece *Bed* (Figure 13). I also sustained the search for

methods of blending my film practice and painting, or printmaking. I worked on film leader using a dye transfer method making the film “Abbott” using images transferred from a comic book (Figure 14). While I worked with using those transferred images out of context, I took my own films and other works out of and in consideration of their original context, to make installations. “Modern Minstrel” featured a painting on Mylar sheet, and a projection of a re-edited Lil Yachty music video⁵ (Figure 15). Lil’ Yachty, is a rapper and entrepreneur. While his success is seen to some as a result of his hustle, his hard work, a lot of others in the hip hop community refer to him as a minstrel cartoon, and a sellout. His video for the song “Peekaboo” I found to be in favor of that notion. “What You See” was a caricatured diptych with projected images from my film “Clear” (Figures 16 and 17). My last installation in the class was a three-part installation with a painted self-portrait on canvas (Figure 18), another on clear Mylar, and a 16mm hand painted loop.

5



Figure 13: "Bed", Acrylic on Canvas, 20"x24", 2017, by Author



Figure 14: Still from "Abbott", 16mm, 2017, by Author



Figure 15: Still from "Modern Minstrel", Acrylic painting on Mylar with Projection (Digital re-edit), 2017, by Author



Figure 16: "What You See" (installation detail), Acrylic on Canvas, 40"x24", 2017, by Author

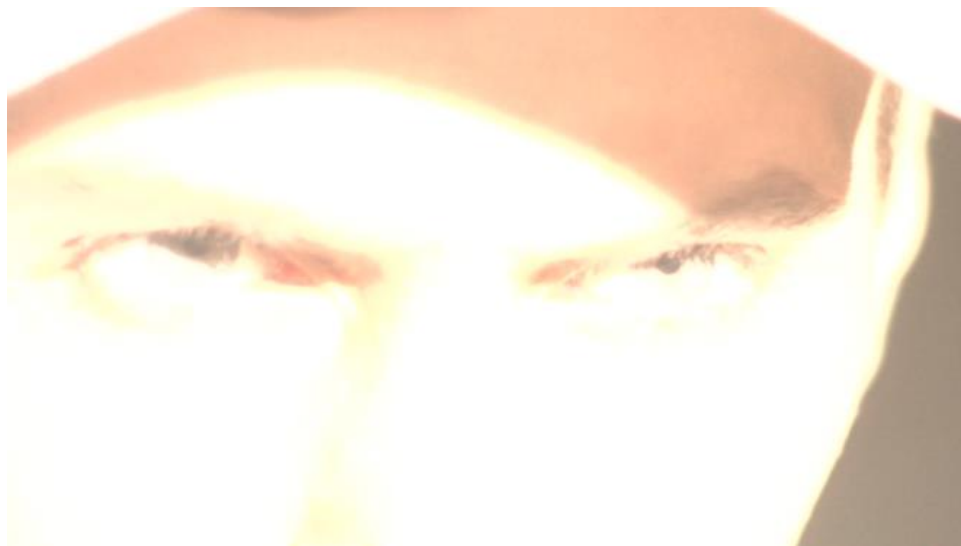


Figure 17: Still from "Gaze"/"What You See" (installation detail), Projection, 2017, by Author



Figure 18: Untitled Self Portrait (installation detail), Acrylic and Charcoal on Canvas, 30"x40", 2017, by Author

Exploring other processes, my third film “Fitted Descriptions” combined narrative and documentary methods, creating a hybrid, experimental narrative (Figures 19 and 20). Invoking Brechtian alienation theory, the piece uses film form to distance the audience and draw attention to the construction of the film. Using a similar mindset, I returned to experimenting with form in my studio practice. “Icon” a diptych (Figures 21 and 22) connected the use of comic book and super hero imagery in my studio practice using simplified construction and appropriation.



Figure 19: Still from "Fitted Descriptions" 2017, Directed by Author



Figure 20: Still from "Fitted Descriptions" 2017, Directed by Author



Figure 21: "Icon Part 1" (Diptych Detail), Charcoal and Collage on Appropriated Fabric, 30"x40", 2018 by Author



Figure 22: "Icon Part 2" (Diptych detail), Acrylic and Charcoal on Appropriated Fabric, 30"x40", 2018, by Author

Nearly all the works are sparked from personal questioning. While initially an attempt to self-examine, the work becomes a larger observation and critique. The references and iconography present a relationship to mass culture, and the images of black bodies relate to an ongoing discussion of space and othering. I shift just as one gets accustomed to viewing. These shifts provide new directions worth exploring. I am currently finishing my fourth film in the program, "No More Heroes, An Anthology" (Figure 23), experimental narrative and

documentary, exhibited as a multi-channel installation, while preparing my BFA studio art exhibition featuring works from the “SUPER”⁶ series.



Figure 23: Still from "No More Heroes: An Anthology" 2019, Directed by Author

⁶ The “SUPER” series is all of the work involving the super-hero iconography. This includes the two-dimensional pieces as well as film.

CHAPTER 3: IDENTITY

“Western depictions often fail to grant the Other the same humanity and psychological complexity as their male European counterparts. Others are viewed as static objects rather than active subjects who possess the same desires and needs as the viewer. Adherence to these traditions make up the foundation of Western prejudice and its psychic armament against understanding anyone who is different from the mainstream culture.” (Hirsch 118)

When I moved out of South Carolina to Florida what became more apparent, was that separation of equality, or my awareness of Othering. I worked in a major theme park in Orlando, drawing people from around the world. The interactions of the white staff and guests alike, in relation to any white party, were drastically different from any non-white party⁷. The longer I worked there, the more I recognized my own preconceptions.

The art of caricature taught me how to identify what makes each person unique from the last. I was inspired by the originality of every drawing. Caricaturists like Jason Seiler gave viewers an uneasy feeling with his rendering of caricatured faces; finishing them in an almost photo manipulated look. Sebastian Kruger, a king in the world of caricature with his early extremely exaggerated paintings, then transitioned to what he calls a “Pop Portrait” focusing solely on celebrity portraiture. I met both artists and spoke with them at the International Society of Caricature Artists (ISCA) conventions in 2014 and 2015. Prior to this experience I had no

⁷ This was the norm of my experience. Of course, everyone was not engaged in the separation but those are the exception.

other training or art history context for which to explore meaning in my work beyond the personal meanings in interactions with the guest. Even so, with these interactions, I came to learn more about viewer expectations.

In exploration of my own identity, I came to look at representations of blackness and masculinity. I was the last living male of my immediate family. My uncle was killed by one of his friends; Washington DC in the 90's was one of the most dangerous cities especially for young black men. My mother's father was involved with the Black Panther party and was killed in relation to that. He died either before she was born or shortly after; this is all I know of him. I, as a light-skinned black male, was made aware of the differences and privileges that skin color affords early on. Being the lightest in my family, I was accustomed to the nicknames, "house boy", and "the white sheep" of the family, or even "uncle tom", by other black people. I recognized within white circles, I was more accepted than friends darker than me and yet, I am still Black. Living in South Carolina for a lot of my youth, this was reinforced often. Interactions with police, teachers, and families of romantic interests set in the notion that regardless of my accomplishments or "likeability", to them I was still not equal.

My time working in caricatures, the history of my relationship to blackness as a youth, and the coming out of my sister and family response made me question notions of identity. I observed, identity as an internal and external force, both through expectations placed on tourists from other countries by coworkers, and through watching those close to me transition to a place of embracing themselves wholly. When was the last time you felt like yourself? For a long time,

my answer to that question was eight years old, the year my uncle died. At that time, I believed in heroes and thought myself to aspire to be one⁸.

The projection of altruism, and the literal power to change things, does a lot for people, particularly young [white] males. White male power fantasy sparked the super hero phenomenon, says Dwayne McDuffie. Dwayne McDuffie is one of the creators of Milestone comics, a black comic company from the nineties, creating titles like, “Icon”, “Blood Syndicate” and “Static”, the latter of which became a part of DC comics. McDuffie says that statement in the documentary “White Scripts and Black Supermen” by Jonathan Gayles. The explosion of the popularity of these images particularly in comics, happens in cycles, predominantly around times of great social change – think Superman and the World Wars, X-Men and the Civil Rights Movement, Marvel Cinematic Universe and Social Justice and Identity Politics. I began writing and illustrating my own comics in high school and started to go to comic shops and bookstores to understand and learn the medium. I wrote the characters and heroes that I didn’t see and desperately needed to see; characters that looked like me. Regarding mass culture, for young black men, the list of superhero icons was very slim, and the introduction of more of them, especially around the seventy’s Blaxploitation era, came as a definite monetary plot. The Blaxploitation era saved Hollywood. Low budget films created to appeal to audiences located in highly populated urban areas, black people. The studios knew representation was important, and with the success of films like “Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song” by Melvin Van Peebles, the

⁸ Not literal tights and cape, I was interested in leadership of some sort.

studios took to the material. The Blaxploitation hero was tough and cool, smooth and dangerous, overly sexualized and quite possibly an anti-hero.

The concept of the hero is ingrained in our storytelling and we hold a particularly high value for that concept, in and out of popular culture. Joseph Campbell catalogs the similar stories in multiple cultures in “The Hero with A Thousand Faces”. He shows the correlations across cultures with hero stories and how they are told. His book has been adapted in to a story structure model for filmmaking called “The Hero’s Journey”. The hero is altruistic and sacrifices themselves for the betterment of mankind. The hero stands as an example and an instrument of change. Think of black male instruments of change. You’ve probably immediately thought of the civil rights era, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, Huey Newton? Now how many of them are still alive? Or of those dead, were by natural causes? The correlation for some young black men becomes that black heroes, instruments of change, must become martyrs to really make an impact. Or at least prepare themselves for that inevitability of an unnatural death. The unnatural deaths of Black people spark social consciousness, marches, riots, and raise questions to the status quo. Trayvon Martin. Tamir Rice, Philando Castille, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, and this is not new: Emmitt Till. Therefore, the notion of the hero becomes less enticing as a story element and as a value to look up to. Or, the qualifiers of what defines a hero begin to change.

When making “Delusions of Grandeur” I referenced artist Barkley Hendricks’ *Icon for My Man Superman* (*Superman Never Saved any Black People – Bobby Seale*) 1969, in my director’s statement. I experienced Barkley Hendricks work at the Whitney museum the week after I wrapped principal photography. His depictions of black bodies were confrontational, and

they used the medium, and iconography of the time to reference black space and identity. The *Icon* painting references Bobby Seale, one of the founders of the Black Panther party. The title, and speech it references, implies that black people must place themselves in the positions they want because those in power, leaders of white spaces will not. Therefore Hendricks, places himself in the context of art history “rather than waiting for someone else to confer the honor upon him” (Whitley 194).

Blackness –
the Black of it,
the rust-red of it,
the milk and cream of it,
the tan and yellow-tan of it,
the deep-brown middle-brown high-brown of it,
the ‘olive’ and ochre of it –
Blackness
marches on.

The above poem is by Gwendolyn Brooks 1980. The connotations that black is many things, can be reflected in the use of a variety of medium. Barkley Hendricks was critiqued by Vivien Raynor of the *New York Times* for his “all-purpose brown” (Whitley 193) skin color in his paintings. The variety of tones in those paintings is unnoticed by the critic.

The handling of Black, as a term and as a medium is masterfully displayed in the works of Kerry James Marshall. In an interview “Paint it Black”, Marshall says, “We live in a material world, in which the things we see shape our expectations.” As such he paints black skin with black paint. The aim, to have more representation of blackness in spaces usually recognized to be more homogenously white. At first glance the viewer may not notice the different varieties in the

black paint; carbon black, and mars black on top of each other creating variations in hue and temperature – and yet they are still black. Kerry James Marshall also chooses not to portray black struggle or pain. He paints mundane scenes of which happen to include black people (very important – not happenstance). Arthur Jafa said, “The question is how come we can’t be as black as we are and still be universal?” Marshall is embodying that very notion.

Speaking of Arthur Jafa, *Daughters of the Dust* was one of the first films I was absorbed in the handling of black skin, and the variety of tones. The themes that enveloped the characters and locale felt connected to my own understandings. Film’s like *Do the Right Thing*, and recently *Moonlight* embody similar feelings. All three critically acclaimed, and yet, still they are talked about canonically as Black films. William R Grant IV poses a similar question as Arthur Jafa of the term “Black film”, “Why can’t *Do The Right Thing* be thought of as a social problem film? Why not think of *Car Wash* (Universal, 1976) as a musical?” (69). The need for the signifier “Black” keeps the separation of Black artists from being recognized in conversations outside of discussions on Blackness.

However, authorship is important, because unlike filmmakers like Day and Lee, the filmmakers of *Hoop Dreams* and *Paris is Burning* have perhaps problematized their films with the covering of minority subjects through a white lens (Davis 28). These documentaries summon cinema vérité, and yet the audience is led by the filmmakers. The subjects feel even less involved in the truth. *Chronicle of a Summer*, another inspiration, charts whether or not the camera’s presence changes how people behave. The documentary covers the limits of cinema vérité, cinema truth. The participants at the end of the film, watch themselves and question the

filmmakers' and other subjects' authenticity.

Along with experimental works by Stan Brakhage, and Christopher Harris, the chronicling of these experiences, works, and artists reflect the influences on my work and the lines of questioning involved in their creation.

CHAPTER 4: EXPECTATION

Within my work hides layers of personal perceptions, representations, and identities, beginning intentionally with *Target 2016*⁹. *Target* was an appropriation of Jasper Johns' *Target with Four Faces* (Figure 24). Appropriation as simply as referencing art history, however the piece encourages further viewing. Like Johns, I was playing on the audience's expectations. Upon another inspection, Johns' work reveals textures created by layers under the paint, and the hidden eyes of the faces abstracts them, leaving questions of the form with the viewer. The target as an object becomes more of an ominous relationship. I installed the painting with four other paintings including the *Face 4/4* painting¹⁰. *Face 4/4* was the first exploration of color regarding blackness and its multiple shades. Painted on gray background the colors are flatly applied and layered rather than attempting to blend. I return to this inquiry in later work. This staging of the works implied a relationship of the black subject to the target; the four faces paintings were each painted in a different style, regardless of them all being self-portraits. A question of identity, changing perceptions, and the common expectations of black bodies, as target.

⁹ Figure 6

¹⁰ Figure 8.



Figure 24: Jasper Johns "Target with Four Faces" Encaustic on Newspaper and Cloth over Canvas surmounted by four tinted-plaster faces in wood box with hinged front, 1955
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78393>

*Delusions of Grandeur*¹¹ was created in response to some of the questions mentioned earlier. As such the production involved many stages. Collaboration was prioritized, so the first step was to gather those identifying with each demographic together for a focus group. In that meeting they talked about representation in the [film] industry, media, and current events. The participants were invited to work on set and be featured in the film. I then partnered with a cinematographer identifying with the demographics to film their respective sections. Filming with five different crews essentially was also a test as this was my first film. The film opens with me as the hero landing in reference to superhero movies. The camera was operated by a fellow classmate on a black magic pocket cinema camera, someone on the same level with similar aspirations. The second section, the hero's costume is changed, no longer bright golden, but black with gold accents. This section is the Women's section, shot on a Canon 70D. The camera change reflecting "deterioration" with the changing of the costume. The cinematographer wanted to use the dslr camera to exploit the camera's handling of natural light in photography and reference the powdering effect of the "beauty shot" of women in film. The next section was filmed with a camera phone, the Immigrant section. A reference to Syrian mobile cinema and the expressive camera work of Latinx cinematographers. A look at accessibility and limitations in independent or state-controlled cinema. The hero reduced to simple clothes with a piece of fabric for a cape. Following that section was a Panasonic DV cam; the LGBTQ cinematographer excited by the color manipulation due to the low bit depth, color being integral to their work on trans-identity, contrasting the black and white plain clothes and fabric the hero wore. The last

¹¹ View film at this link: <https://vimeo.com/294510145/b0ac809e2a>

section was the Black minority specific section shot on 16mm film. I was the director of photography, actor, and director, making this section the most personal. The portrayal of the hero now in a hoodie returns to the initial prompt. The hero is stopped by the police and aggressively taken to the ground. The film ends there, as a documentary, verité style credit sequence highlights the makers of the work. The collaborative nature of the production being the important take-away of the piece, everyone involved informed, worked on, and was featured in the film. As the technology or platform reverted closer to actual film celluloid, the content became closer to my own personal identification. The intention of looking backwards or to the beginning to get to the real connection the essence of the medium. *Delusions of Grandeur* was not my thoughts of myself as a hero, but instead a look at artists as instruments of change, and my own feelings of my place and my work to be a part of that change. It was an study in collaboration and voice. Overall the film received positive feedback from those involved and the impact of the final section was praised. A new expectation arose that I would be prioritizing work that was socially conscious.

Unless necessary I will not explain as much detail as the two prior pieces. They stand as an account to the layering of content through form for reference on experiencing the other work. The work continues to have those layers, and as mentioned above with *Spencer Shoots 16mm Top Load*¹² I began working with distancing.

¹² Figure 11.

My second film, *Clear*¹³ utilized the same functions of distancing as my two-dimensional work. Using performance delivery as the focus of separation, we designed a space that heightened a stylistic environment. As a nod to Kenneth Anger, the use of 1961 R&B song by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, “I’ve Been Good To You”, creates an additional subtext. The over the top performance, popular music, hero film aesthetic, and archival footage of protests, rallies, and the Charlottesville incident, all work with and against each other to distance the viewer while uncovering additional content that is not as blatant as the dialogue suggests.

*Abbott*¹⁴ features images transferred from a comic, of the same title, about hiding the truth and a black detective seeking justice. Taken out of its original context the truth is further abstracted. This re-appropriation of actual material is utilized in the installations *Modern Minstrel*¹⁵ and *What You See*¹⁶. *Modern Minstrel* appropriates minstrel imagery from late 19th century and media from the 1930s and juxtaposes that with a current popular music icon; the pairing leading the audience to certain conclusions. However, the spectacle of projection distracts from the audience painted into the piece. The non-descript figures, assumed white audience laughs at the minstrels on what is, in actuality and in relation to the image, a screen. *What You See* takes an overexposed image from *Clear* of the antagonist’s eyes projected onto the caricature of a mugshot, self-portrait as criminal. Caricaturing of the subject plus projection is a literal translation of a [white] viewer’s projections onto black people creating their cartoonish,

¹³ View film at this link: <https://vimeo.com/270720884/22d8dd6ede>

¹⁴ View film at this link: <https://vimeo.com/311561292>

¹⁵ Figure 15

¹⁶ Figure 16 and 17.

stereotyped perceptions. The *Untitled Self Portrait*¹⁷ installation, featured a similar translation of language, using abstract projections onto the first simplified, cell shaded¹⁸ self-portrait (raised above using rope tied into a noose), that cast a shadow onto the second portrait. Readings of these works were mixed and often viewers unable to connect with the content, however the impact of the image itself, or the spectacle of the installation was the attraction.

*Fitted Descriptions*¹⁹ was informed by the processes I had previously been working in, and Brechtian Alienation theory. Bertolt Brecht, was a German playwright and poet that considered the effect on the audience if they were made aware of the form of a performance. The notice of the construction of the work would clue the audience in on the decision making, not allowing them to be absorbed in the dramatized world, and instead provide a chance to consider the reasons for those decisions, the subtext and social implications of the piece. I utilized the distancing effect in this film specifically, following a small narrative of a hero, the film's initial distance is the blend of a cinema vérité/documentary style camera juxtaposed with a lateral tracking action shot edited over a lo-fi soundtrack. The intent was to lead the audience to question whether they are watching a narrative or a documentary. The following scene leads into a clearly narrative performance, and then at the introduction of the next scene, there is a voice over interview narration. The elements of documentary return. The camerawork was responsive to the actors, even in staged environments and scripted blocking, keeping an unstable camera. Shot on Black Magic's Ursa Mini 4.6k camera, the film was left in Black Magic's flat color

¹⁷ Figure 18

¹⁸ Cell shaded akin to animation, making the image appear to be cartooned.

¹⁹ View film at this link: <https://vimeo.com/270739874/0511ec5693>

profile. This is a challenge to the language and convention of “normalizing” footage.

Normalization refers to making the colors and values in the image adhere to certain image standards. Some of that language involves “fixing” the black point. As a challenge to language and the use of the word “norm”, I leave the perceived blacks, as brown. The flat image profile allows for and calls for manipulation of color space in post-production. If not addressed a gray or browning of the black areas of the image can be seen. Leaving these areas brown invokes the works of Hendricks and Marshall, challenging the language of what black is. The sound in the piece jumps back and forth from interview audio, and scripted dialogue, the change between actors speaking in interview and speaking through the character is blurred. The technical aspects of the film regarding sound and image are challenging audience absorption into the work, in order to offer the effect of alienation. After the filming and post process, I held a screening for the work. This piece was a success in so far as the audience responded to and were distanced by the moments I expected. The cinematographers in the audience mentioned the camera work and flat image, the sound artists mentioned the disruptive sound elements, and others weren’t aware if there was a final message. As for their reception, they were left confused and some refused to do any active participation, stating, “Audiences don’t want to do work”. The film itself places language and convention into challenge, and the expected outcome of narrative cinema is subverted for nuanced conversation regarding perception and expectation. There were only a few viewers, that did in fact reflect on those moments and found some profundity in the spaces or breathing room in the piece. One example, a viewer mentioned that one of the characters from the basketball court, when interviewed in the documentary footage touched them, as they seemed

real and vulnerable in that moment. This reception of the character contrasts with the tough attitude in the actor's staged performance. Each viewer experiences something different and are distanced by different elements in the work. Each viewer alienated for a time with few able to make the correlations to the film's social implication.

As I incorporate the image of the hero in two-dimensional work, I also returned to the notions of authorship. *Icon*²⁰ was painted and collaged onto appropriated fabrics, utilizing transfer methods and collage from comic books. The piece, referencing popular culture, uses commodity as medium, and recontextualizes the existing object by introducing other figuration and collage onto the fabrics. As a diptych they refer to each other as well, and the return to my image retrieves the exploration of self-identity. By using appropriated imagery, I am in conversation with those entities. The comic book fabric is sold in department stores, comics becoming even less niche due to the explosion of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. I position my greyscale image over the colorful Marvel background. The other piece places the DC comics universe superstars, Batman and Superman upside down in opposition, as a Figure in a hoodie stands defiantly upright. The collaged elements, mimicking a chine colle piece I made, are pulled from comic books from the Milestone Comic property, "Icon". The black superhero presented in the hoodie in full color, stands out among the black and white DC icons.

No More Heroes: An Anthology is my last film in the BFA Film Production program. It features a narrative sewn throughout the imagery, blatant and not, as well as documentary, animation, and a few experimental segments. The introductory segment "Immartyl" appears to

²⁰²⁰ Figures 21 and 22

be a traditional narrative structure, but something is off – the sound. The characters are talking to each other, but the audience cannot hear their words. The audience does however hear the voice of the officer that shoots one of the characters. The second segment “Trap: US Informal” opens with light play spectacle, the following performance happens in a scarcely lit void space. The characters are in superhero costume, and once again, they do nothing heroic. The dialogue in the film leaves little hints on the invisible connotations of the many definitions of the title word “trap”. The third segment is a documentary, “No More Heroes”. Interwoven into the documentary is a return to the narrative. The narrative is linked in all sections, however without noticing the screen position of the characters or simply viewing the credits this is not apparent. Following the documentary is a narrative segment that features a caricatured black minstrel animation in a superhero costume, called “House Hero”. The animated character is the only one that speaks in the live action segment. The character’s dialogue is exaggerated and offensive, playing to stereotype. Eventually the animated character takes over the screen and addresses the audience. Brought back by a siren and gunshot, when we return to the live action image, the other character is wearing the costume. The cartoon is wearing the other character’s clothes and is dying from a gunshot wound. He is still the only one speaking. The fifth segment is an experimental film juxtaposing images of hooded Figures, chains, and superhero iconography. Finishing out the anthology is “Immartyl: Reprise” covering what happened the night before the events of the opening film. The return to the day previous illustrates the cyclical viewing structure of the entire anthology and reveals character connections. The film is intended to be viewed in the same venue as the other films, challenging viewers’ expectations of that

environment. It is a three-channel installation in a single channel environment. I crafted a three-channel script to describe the events as they occur on each screen (Appendix A). The film feels disjointed as an anthology, however threads linking the films are present. Those threads are mostly noticeable through viewing of my previous works. This creates a certain effect with alienation theory, that calls attention to the viewers personal experience with the author and author's other works – references from other works appear in this anthology. Each viewer's experience will differ depending on their previous engagement with the work, their personal experiences, and from their positioning in the cinema in relation to the three screens. Without the full frame of reference, the viewer is automatically distanced. The spectacle will be an attracting factor, but the spectacle is reduced by the limited time frame of each segment. The tryptic will be projected center, left and right, of the audience. Some viewers will have to turn their heads entirely to see each screen. This physical disorientation reminds the viewer that this is a film and prevents them from being absorbed into the work. The construction of the film and the attempt to alienate audiences ultimately is an attempt to encourage viewers to have an active role during and after the viewing of the piece. This was not successful in my previous film, however those aware of that work will have greater context to this one. Viewers unaware will not know what to expect outside of their own understanding of film convention. As such I have created a space requiring investigation through both form and content.

CONCLUSION

My work has transitioned from technical exploration to a conceptual practice. Both methods remain personal, however. By engaging outside of my own understanding, I am able to impart a universality into the work that address human language and conventional understanding as themes. The Alienation effect poses a discourse with conventional understanding as the images remain founded in those conventions while challenging them. I am most successful in my experimental film works, like *Abbott* and *Work*, using this method as their abstractions cause me to focus more on delivering information through form. Over all this body of work has introduced new conversations into the environments I find myself in now. These works created for and in response to academic discourse are not necessarily accessible by wider audiences. While the images remain strong, and recognizable, the theories and concerns of the works may be glossed over for lack of engagement with the concepts, or too many layers.

A breakthrough in the understanding of my work and the directions I can move forward to, happened in 2017. I created a few works that were formal experiments with medium. Using black and white as subject, medium, and contextual language, I made the works *Black Face White Space* (Figure 25) and, *Cool and Flat* (Figure 26). These works are distilled to what is necessary. *BF/WS* is a woodblock print utilizing black ink and white ink on black and white paper. Using one space of black on black, and one space of white on white, displayed as a diptych or across from each other, the viewer's perception is challenged. The white is always visible, while the black disappears on the black paper, surrounded by white inked faces.



Figure 25: "Black Face White Space", Woodblock Print on Arches, 22"x26"ea, 2017, by Author



Figure 26: "Cool and Flat", Acrylic on Canvas, 36"x36" ea, 2017, by Author

Cool and Flat features work referencing a series of ceramic tiles I made with black and white glazes (Figure 27). The black tiles, upon closer inspection, appear blue due to the cobalt in the black glaze, and the black painting was made without the use of black paint. The paint is flat and heavy body acrylic paint is layered with fluid acrylic paint to give illusion of dimensionality. When viewing the piece at different angles the face appears in an almost three-dimensional

illusion at times, and the square is rendered as completely black from certain distances. The white tiles crackled after firing due to the chemistry of the white glaze, creating a brittleness. Fragility as language and medium is explored in the white painting. Home depo has over 300 variations of acrylic “white” house paint. Paints with clever names like “Ultra-Pure White” or “Innocent White” and “White’s White” were used in the painting. The difference unnoticeable when an individual paint covers a full wall, but as with Kerry James Marshall’s use of different layers of blacks the same effect happens with the whites layered; the temperatures and tones are very apparent. With the nature of canvas material and house paint, over time the white painting, painted flatly to be washed out (or overexposed) under light, will begin to crack and peel highlighting its fragility. Placed together as a diptych and sometimes displayed with the tiles as another nod to Jasper Johns’ *Target With Four Faces*, the comparisons between black and white and references to culture, language, and art history become apparent.



Figure 27: "Black White Relief", Ceramic Tile, 8"x8"ea, 2017, by Author

A return to the use of black and white as medium in experimental film, *Work* (Figure 28) holds the same relationships as the previous two pieces. *Work* is an abstraction of figuration due to the manipulation of frame rate in the camera, the speed at which the image is captured, hiding notions of race behind spectacle. This is the return to the filming of a black and white hula hoop dancer juxtaposed respectively with white and black backgrounds. Their physical bodies played in reference to each other, their dance distracting. Physical work is also referenced in images of bicycles, walking, and mechanical motion of vehicles. The viewer must be actively engaged or “work” to see the underlying racial connections.



Figure 28: Still from "Work", 2019, by Author

My work uses perception, representation, identity, and expectation, to challenge language and conventional understanding. Only when we are active participants can all the information be accessed. It is impossible to engage without expectations. Likewise, it is impossible to account for the entire gamut of expectations. Built into my pieces are responses to the expectations and perceptions that I have personally experienced. Viewers that notice and acknowledge those perceptions have either felt justified by their reveal or were defensive and vehemently disavowed their association with those perceptions. We are conditioned by the way we experience the world. This body of work neither proves nor disproves a particular expected outcome. It recognizes the multitude of experiences with which different viewers will approach the work and

calls attention to different perceptions. It is up to the viewer to acknowledge their own expectations and question them. Only then can greater understanding be achieved.

Moving forward I will continue my exploration into Brechtian Alienation. Working in black and white and experimental film. I will also look for ways to blend theory across platforms. Similar to the way I engaged Arnheim and Balasz, I am interested in juxtaposing Brecht with Clement Greenberg's writings on the Kitsch and Avant Garde, as well as Greenberg's concept of the essence of the medium. Brechtian alienation is considered a political, perhaps Marxist, method and Greenberg's comments on the importance of abstraction to remove the ability to propagandize art would be an interesting experiment. I hypothesize that with pieces like *Cool and Flat* and other artists' work like Odili Donald Odita, abstraction while distancing to content, can be political.

**APPENDIX A:
THREE CHANNEL SCRIPT FORMAT**

IMMARTYRL/NO MORE HEROES/TRAP: US INFORMAL/HOUSE HERO/IMMARTYRL-REPRISE/SUPER MPOSE

By Trevon Coleman

Draft 3

12 February 2018 ; Draft 1

5 March 2018 ; Draft 1.2

19 March 2018 ; Draft 2

2 April 2018 ; Draft 3

16 April 2018 ; Draft 4

Original Story

tjcole@knights.ucf.edu

BLACK

EXT. STREET - DAY

TYSON, 11 years old, black, is smiling.

He's walking down the street with his uncle, SEAUN, 22.

Seaun and Tyson are wearing hoodies, jeans, sneakers.

Seaun is carrying a video game console under his arm. An XBOX 360. Tyson is carrying the controllers. His face is stretched from smiling.

Time is slowed. They are in bliss.

A SIREN sounds. Then a HORN.

OFFICER (O.S.)

Get out of the road!

Seaun looks up. His smile disappears. He nods his head and moves Tyson toward the sidewalk.

The sound of a cop car DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES. Then another.

OFFICER (O.S.)

Hang on. What's your name?
Show me some I.D. son.

BLACK

<p>EXT. STREET - DAY</p> <p>Tyson flinches once.</p> <p>On the third shot, he turns to run. He drops the controllers.</p> <p>The Xbox falls as Seau stumbles backward falling onto the sidewalk. The Xbox shatters.</p> <p>Tyson runs. Tears stream down his face. He doesn't look back.</p> <p>From across the street – Tyson runs away screen left to right. Wide shot, then tracking dolly with Tyson</p>	<p>Seau turns to grab for his wallet, but the XBOX is in his arms. He fumbles a bit.</p> <p>OFFICER (O.S.)</p> <p>Stop! Let me see your hands!</p> <p>Seau looks up to see Tyson on the sidewalk. His brow is wrinkled. He doesn't understand what's happening.</p> <p>It happens in a blink of an eye.</p> <p>Seau turns to raise his hands.</p> <p>Tyson flinches once.</p> <p>Twice.</p> <p>On the third shot, he turns to run. He drops the controllers.</p> <p>The Xbox falls as Seau stumbles backward falling onto the sidewalk. The Xbox shatters.</p> <p>Tyson runs. Tears stream down his face. He doesn't look back.</p> <p>In slow-motion - Tyson runs directly toward camera. Seau falls in the background. The xbox is shattered.</p>	<p>EXT. STREET - DAY</p> <p>Twice.</p> <p>On the third shot, he turns to run. He drops the controllers.</p> <p>The Xbox falls as Seau stumbles backward falling onto the sidewalk. The Xbox shatters.</p> <p>Tyson runs. Tears stream down his face. He doesn't look back.</p> <p>From directly behind Tyson's head OTB – Tyson runs away from camera. Track, then, camera lowers to ground.</p>
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EXT. PROTEST - DAY

The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching.

The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward.

The crowd walks screen right to left.

EXT. PROTEST - DAY

The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching.

The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward.

HEROES

No more heroes die today! We will not go away! No more heroes die to day!

Moving into the crowd a FATHER, black male, mid to late 40's, chants and holds his reluctant SON, black male, preteen, along.

FATHER

No More!

(to son)

Hey, pick up the pace, come on.

SON

(under breath)

This is so lame.

EXT. PROTEST - DAY

The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching.

The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward.

The crowd walks screen left to right.

<p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching. The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward. The crowd walks screen left to right. </p>	<p> FATHER This is important. Let's go. The Father ushers his son along to move with the crowd. The Father continues the chant. PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. Moving further into the crowd we stop with a FEMALE HERO and her ROOMMATE. The hero glows brightly, overexposed, her image mostly obscured by light. Her roommate is exposed normally. They are holding hands and chant in unison. FEMALE HERO Thanks for coming with me. ROOMMATE Of course! I didn't know there were so many super heroes. Can they all do what you can do? FEMALE HERO Well, not exactly. </p>	<p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching. The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward. The crowd walks screen right to left. </p>
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<p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. </p> <p> The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching. </p> <p> The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward. </p> <p> The crowd moves forward away from camera. Flags adorn their backs like capes. </p> <p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. </p>	<p> Through the crowd there are few others glowing, over exposed like the Female Hero. Some in costume, some in regular clothes. </p> <p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. THEY ARE STANDING WITH REGULAR PEOPLE. </p> <p> Moving through the crowd we come across a flag, non-American. </p> <p> Walking backwards wearing the flag as a cape is an IMMIGRANT HERO, chanting and raising their hands up high. </p> <p> IMMIGRANT HERO </p> <p> We are here to stay! We won't go away! We are here to stay! </p> <p> The Immigrant Hero continues the chant while walking. </p> <p> A sea of flags of many nations, blending in a sea of colors. The flag holders all chant with the Immigrant Hero. </p> <p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. </p> <p> A rainbow flag passes through the crowd. </p>	<p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. </p> <p> The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching. </p> <p> The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward. </p> <p> The crowd moves forward away from camera. Flags adorn their backs like capes. </p> <p> PORTRAITS OF HEROES IN COSTUME IN THE CROWD. </p> <p> A rainbow flag passes through the crowd </p> <p> The waving flag lingers on screen. </p>
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A rainbow flag passes through the crowd.

The waving flag lingers on screen.

The waving flag lingers on screen.

The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching.

The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward.

The crowd marches directly toward and past camera.

The Father walks forward. The Son, ALEX, reluctantly follows with his head down. Alex, looks at the edge of the march where the barriers are set up.

Then disappears into the spectators at the edge of the march

The waving flag lingers on screen.

The waving flag lingers on screen.

Dancing through the center of the crowd moving forward is a group of LGBTQ+ HEROES.

LGBTQ+ HERO

We will not go away! We were born this way! We will not go away!

Some wave, some twirl and death drop. In succession the others following dance past the camera.

The crowd is thick. The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs, and march forward in protest.

He sees Tyson, in a black hoodie on the other side of the barrier.

Tyson is not smiling. The event holds no catharsis for him.

Then disappears into the spectators at the edge of the march

The waving flag lingers on screen

The crowd is thick. Hundreds of people gather; they are all chanting, all marching.

The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs and march forward.

The crowd marches directly toward and past camera.

Tyson looks over and makes eye contact with Alex. Then disappears into the spectators at the edge of the march

The crowd is thick. The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs, and march forward in protest.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. SHIPPING CONAINTER - NIGHT

Black screen stays dark until a sliver of light flashes through cracks in the metal.

A bright light flashes through another crack. A SHARP TONE rings. Juaquin turns around.

Alex slips away from his father and heads toward the barrier to run after Tyson.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. SHIPPING CONAINTER - NIGHT

Black screen stays dark until a sliver of light flashes through cracks in the metal.

RUSTLING is heard as two heroes, SAM, mid to late twenties, and JUAQIN, same age, stand up and walk around their tight confinement to peak out of the gaps.

Sam

How long has it been?

Juaquin

Three days.

Sam leaves the gap. It's too dark in the container to see.

SAM

Are you fucking kidding me?

The crowd is thick. The group is colorful, with people in costume. There are heroes in the crowd. Heroes and their friends and families. They have signs, and march forward in protest.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. SHIPPING CONAINTER - NIGHT

Black screen stays dark until a sliver of light flashes through cracks in the metal.

WHIMPERING can be heard behind the Heroes.

JUAQUIN
What's wrong?
SAM
What's wrong? We're trapped like dogs!
JUAQUIN
Where are we going to go?
SAM
I don't know, but I can't sit by.

JUAQUIN
Is that what you think I'm doing?
SAM
That's not what I'm saying.
Juaquin meets Sam in the middle of the container.
JUAQUIN
We'll die if we stay here. Wont we?

A bright light. A SHARP TONE. The container rumbles. Juaguin moves away from the cracks.

Bright lights begin to peek through the cracks of the container. A SHARP TONE. The container rumbles.

Behind them cowering in the back of the container are silhouettes of other figures.

The lights get brighter and surround the container. The TONE gets louder.

The container rumbles.

Bright white light floods the container.

The cowering group of heroes in the back of the container are covered in light.

The SHARP TONE rings loud.

SAM

I won't let that happen.

Sam embraces ~~Juquin~~.

MAN (O.S.)

Over here!

Bright lights begin to peek through the cracks of the container. A SHARP TONE. The container rumbles.

Beams of light flash over the heroes.

The container rumbles.

The doors burst open and bright white light floods the container.

The heroes are engulfed in light.

The SHARP TONE rings loud.

Bright lights begin to peek through the cracks of the container. A SHARP TONE. The container rumbles.

The lights get brighter and surround the container. The TONE gets louder.

The container rumbles.

Bright white light floods the container.

The cowering group of heroes in the back of the container are covered in light.

The SHARP TONE rings loud.

BLACK

EXT. COMMERCIAL STREET - DAY

MARCUS, mid 20's black male, wearing a hoodie, walks out of a corner store onto the sidewalk. He looks at his watch.

A WHITE WOMAN passes by. He doesn't turn as she passes.

When she passes, WALLACE, a minstrel cartoon, dressed as a superhero, does turn his head from right behind Marcus.

WALLACE

Got ~~Dayum!~~ Hey bae bae! ~~Sheevit!~~ Nigga did you see that ass? She got a ass like a black gurl!

He turns back to see Marcus has already started walking away.

WALLACE

Hey ~~hey~~, don't act like you didn't see that. Uppity ass ~~mutha~~ fucker. You too good to look at girls now?

Marcus pays no attention. Suddenly Wallace appears on the other shoulder. His expression sly.

BLACK

Wallace walks onto the black screen.
He paces to the center of the screen.

WALLACE

Don't tell me you into boys?

(beat)

Nigga! Are you serious? ~~Haha~~, You
sweet!

Wallace cracks himself up and rolls on
the ground laughing.

Marcus looks at his watch. He looks
across the street.

Wallace gets up and moves forward.

WALLACE

Why you so uptight? You embarrassed
of me?

Wallace picks up his pace.

WALLACE

You think you better than me?

Marcus pauses. He still does not
acknowledge Wallace.

Marcus is freeze framed.

WALLACE
I'm talking to *you* nigga!

Wallace appears.

WALLACE
You look to the left.
Wallace disappears.

He pops up on screen. He singles out
one person in the audience.

Wallace flies back to center screen.

WALLACE
Oh, I know what you're thinking.
Wallace walks off screen.

Wallace appears.

WALLACE
How many niggas do you count in this
room?
Wallace looks over, shocked!

Wallace walks into screen.

WALLACE
You look to the right.
Wallace disappears

WALLACE

That's racist! I oughta beat yo a_

The screen blinks a black frame.

He turns back into the scene to see
Marcus on top of a guy dressed in black.

Marcus stands up with a purse in his
hands.

A shot is fired.

The screen blinks a black frame.

Wallace is lying on the ground in the
hoodie Marcus was wearing.

Marcus is in the super hero costume. He
is looking at Wallace laying on the
sidewalk.

Wallace coughs up blood.

WALLACE

Ughh, Fuck! Fuck you nigga! Fuck you...

Cartoon clouds part and light shines
onto Wallace.

WALLACE

The light... Fuck you nigga. I knew it. I
knew...

Marcus stands looking at Wallace in
disbelief.

Wallace is cut off by the sound of a
POLICE SIREN.

The screen blinks a black frame.

The purse snatcher looks in disbelief.

The voices of the woman and police can be heard.

WOMAN (O.S.)

What the hell are you doing?

OFFICER (O.S.)

Ma'am please stay back. Are you okay?

The frame moves over to see the woman on the sidewalk talking to an unseen officer.

WOMAN

Am I okay? You just shot him! He was helping me get my purse back!

Wallace twitches and clutches himself in pain.

Wallace coughs up blood.

WALLACE

I knew it ~~motha fucka~~... I knew (cough)...
I knew you saw that white girl.

Wallace dies.

Marcus stares at the dead cartoon.

CUT TO BLACK.

The purse snatcher looks over to the woman and the police officer.

The purse snatcher looks at Marcus.

The purse snatcher slowly backs up, then turns and walks away.

EXT/INT. ALEX'S HOUSE – DUSK - TRACK

The colors of the comic book page pop.
The page is turned.

ALEX (O.S.)

And here! He's like, POW! And he flies
off to save everybody!

The page is turned.

ALEX (O.S.)

But of course more bad guys are in his
way first!

Alex, at eight years old, and Tyson near
the same age, sit on the front porch of
Alex's house looking at a comic book.

Tyson points to the page.

TYSON

There's no way! There's too many of
them!

ALEX

No it's fine cause he's bullet proof. ~~see?~~

Tyson pauses for a beat. His interest in
the comic has faded. Alex is still looking
through the pages, there's a stack of
comics next to him.

Alex looks over to see Tyson distant stare.

ALEX

What's the matter?

TYSON

That stuff's stupid.

ALEX

What?

TYSON

It's not real.

Alex closes the book and adds it to the stack.

ALEX

Of course, but that's the style.

TYSON

No, I mean. Heroes. They not real.

Alex pauses then gets up and walks into the house. He stops and looks back to Tyson.

ALEX

Come on! I wanna show you something.

Tyson gets up reluctantly and walks into the house with Alex.

It is a moderately sized home, middle income.

Alex leads Tyson to a door, and they enter the dark space together. Nothing is visible as they walk through.

ALEX

Who's your favorite?

TYSON

Hero? You mean like superman or something? I don't got one I guess.

Tyson tries to adjust his eyes to the dark.

TYSON

Why? What are we doing in here?

Alex flips a light switch on. The boys are inches apart.

ALEX

My dad's my Hero.

Tyson rolls his eyes, and starts to say something when he looks up.

Up on a pedestal, in front of the boys is Alex's dad's costume, the light falls over it. The cape seems to glow.

TYSON

Woah!

ALEX

Pretty cool huh?

Alex pops Tyson's shoulder. They keep staring at the costume.

ALEX

My dad used to be a real hero.

Alex's mom, Mira, calls from down the hall.

MIRA (O.S.)

Tyson! Your uncle is here to pick you up.

Tyson runs toward the door. He stops in the doorway.

TYSON

Is your dad bullet proof?

ALEX

I dunno, probably?

Tyson pauses. He looks toward the porch, then smiles at Alex.

TYSON

My uncle.

ALEX

Huh?

TYSON

He's my Hero!

Tyson runs off to meet his uncle, ~~Seau~~^{Sean}, 18 or 19 years old.

Alex smiles. The costume sits in the light.

CUT TO BLACK.

Flashes of white

Flashes of people in costume b/w

Hoodie

Hoodie White

Black Screen.

Experimental

Flashes of black

Flashes of people in costume b/w

Flashes of same people in hoodie. Black.

Flashes of same people in hoodie. White.

Flashes of people in b/w

Costume

Close up black

Close up white

Black Screen

Flashes of white

Flashes of people in costume b/w

Hoodie

Costume white

Black screen.

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